

WILLIAMS FORK RIVER DIESEL SPILL IN COLORADO: EXPOSURE AND POTENTIAL

IMPACT TO AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

A diesel spill occurred on November 6, 1997, when a tanker truck crashed into the Williams Fork River south of Craig, Colorado. The accident resulted in a spill of 7500 gallons of red-dye diesel into the Williams Fork River, approximately 5 miles upstream of its confluence with the Yampa River. The diesel moved downstream into the Yampa River, which is designated critical habitat for the endangered Colorado pikeminnow. Response efforts of Fish and Wildlife Service biologists initially considered migratory birds and the Colorado pikeminnow but ultimately focused on the pikeminnow. Fish which function as surrogates of the pikeminnow were collected two weeks and six months after the spill for chemical analysis. Concentrations of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) were high in the fish collected two weeks after the spill, but had declined substantially in the fish collected six months post-spill. Risks for the Colorado pikeminnow from the spill were evaluated.

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